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## Trends. Can Accountability Be Accountable? General Fogleman Requests Retirement

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Ultimately military personnel deal with life and death Issues--even if for many of these personnel the likelihood of the ultimate is very remote. Requiring accountability for these personnel--the taking of responsibility for one's actions and their consequences--is a sound abstract principle. However, it too easily breaks down in concrete instances.

A military leader might demand punishment for all--including himself or herself--whenever one's action or lack of it is followed by noxious consequences. Even recognizing that events occur that are indeed beyond the control and comprehension of humans, such a leader would at least possess a consistent policy. One exemplification of this is the common, corrupted Spartan aphorism--"Come back with your shield or on it." There are no excuses.

Many United States (US) military leaders and their civilian authorities have taken a different tack. They have attempted to make judicious distinctions about the causal nature of one's action, inaction, and some consequence. They have also attempted to make similar distinctions about the value and intensity of the consequence. This is both admirable and consistent common US values. Whether it is the best way to control a military organization is more controversial.

Today the huge problem for US Air Force accountability is that some military leaders and some civilian authorities take neither of the two above approaches--although they publicly claim and may privately believe that they do. Instead they do one of three things. (1) They play politics and seek anything from mass media visibility, a higher probability of being elected or promoted, greater financial assets, or more support for their own ideology. (2) They seek some self-psychological effect--catharsis, transcendence, sacrificing to one's supergo, closure--as resolution of a noxious consequence. (3) They act on the sincere belief that some people--both spies and counterspies, terrorists and anti/counterterrorists, perpetrators and perpetrators, the malign and the benign--always are responsible for events. A quote which may exemplify this approach was cited recently by The New York Times from US Senator Richard Shelby (Republican-Alabama), Chair, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, concerning the Khobar complex bombing--"Someone should be held accountable, shouldn't they?"

So, should someone be held accountable for the bombing or--for that matter-- other noxious events in the world. The easy answer is sure--the spies, the terrorists, the malign who planned, supported, and perpetrated the act. The more difficult but correct answer is that the counterspies, the anti/counterterrorists, and the benign are not always by the widest stretch of the imagination responsible for all events and, therefore, should sometimes not be held accountable. The inquisitors who venally play politics, narcissistically seek self-psychological effect, and sincerely advocate for the prepotency of an omnipresent concept are actually subverting accountability's essence and its positive consequences for military organizations. And in General Fogleman's case, they are accountable for the loss of a decent man who has been a judicious practitioner of accountability. (See Double, R. (1996.) Four naturalist accounts of moral responsibility. *Behavior and Philosophy*, 24, 137-143; Schmid, J., & Fiedler, K. (1996.) Language and implicit attributions in the Nuremberg Trials: Analyzing prosecutors' and defense attorneys' closing speeches. *Human Communication Research*, 23, 371-398; Schmitt, E. (July 29,

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1997.) Air Force chief quits, displeased with handling of Saudi bombing Issue. The New York Times.  
(<http://www.nytimes.com>))(Keywords: Accountability, Military Personnel, Military)